

A NEWSLETTER

ABOUT PREVENTION,

PREPAREDNESS

AND RESPONSE

# Spill SCENE

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Washington State Department of Ecology

## Gasoline leak, explosion kills 3

# Spills Staff Respond to Pipeline Incident

On June 10 a ruptured underground pipeline leaked thousands of gallons of gasoline into Whatcom Falls Park in Bellingham, WA. The resultant fumes and explosion killed three people and triggered a massive response from emergency and environmental agencies, including Ecology's Spills Program.

Two 10-year-old boys died of burns from the explosion and an 18-year-old man drowned after being overcome by the fumes and falling into the creek. The blast and fire charred almost two miles of streamside habitat along Hanna and Whatcom Creeks. It destroyed a home and damaged a city water facility near the explosion point. The fire burned so hot that not even worms in the soil survived, much less any fish in what had once been salmon-spawning waters.

The cause of the pipe rupture is still under investigation. The break could have leaked as much as 277,000 gallons. The pipeline, operated by Olympic Pipeline Company, carries fuel from refineries at Ferndale and Cherry Point south to terminals in Seattle, Tacoma, and Portland. The company has shut down the northernmost 37 miles of pipeline until the cause of the break has been

determined, and is operating its remaining segments at less than full capacity.

During the first days after the explosion Spills Program staff worked on many elements of the response to the spill and explosion,

including the Unified Command, which controls all aspects of the response. After the initial emergency response phase, Ecology's primary jobs at the site are investigating the causes of the leak,

**See PIPELINE, page 2**



*Smoke fills the sky above Bellingham, WA after gasoline from a leaking pipeline ignited and exploded June 10.*

## **PIPELINE, continued from page 1**

assessing the environmental damage and devising a recovery plan. Spills Program staff remain heavily involved in both aspects.

The investigation is being led by the National Transportation Safety Board and the Office of Pipeline Safety in the U. S. Department of Transportation. The environmental assessment, also known as NRDA, for Natural Resource Damage Assessment, is a joint effort of Ecology and the state offices of Fish and Wildlife, Natural Resources, and Parks.

Fuel pipelines in Washington state are regulated for safety and for environmental protection. States do not currently have the authority to implement safety standards on interstate pipelines, although they do have such authority for intrastate lines. Safety standards for interstate pipelines are imposed at the federal level, by the Office of Pipeline Safety. Historically, the Office of Pipeline Safety has been concerned only with safety issues, until the 1990 Oil Protection Act added some environmental protection responsibilities at the federal level.

In Washington, however,

Ecology has a direct mandate from the Legislature to protect the environment. To perform this function, Ecology requires pipelines, refineries, and other oil-handling facilities to submit plans to show how they will prevent spills from occurring, and how they will respond if a spill does occur. Engineers in the Spills Program headquarters office review the prevention plans for compliance with environmental protection standards, and Spills regional office staff review the response, or contingency, plans. Regional staff also work with companies on drills to test their ability to carry out the contingency plans.

Although pipeline regulatory responsibilities are divided between safety and environmental protection, both safety and environmental problems are caused by the same things, according to Joe Subsits, one of the engineers reviewing facility prevention plans.

"Where we feel there's an environmental gap in the federal standards, we'll go ahead and impose our state [environmental] standards," Subsits said. "Where we would really impose our

standards would be after a spill. We'll investigate and require changes to prevent future environmental problems. We have a real interest in doing an investigation and learning from an incident."

Subsits estimated the investigation into the Bellingham spill and explosion will take some time to finish, at least several months. The ruptured piece of pipe that leaked has been excavated and sent to a federal lab for testing. Most of the fuel that could be recovered from the creek and soil has been recovered. Plans are moving ahead for restoring the creeks and the area charred in the fire.

## **Call for public comment period C-Plan Review Process Set**

Ecology has recently revised the Contingency Plan Review Manual used to evaluate Washington's vessel and facility oil spill contingency plans. The new manual is available from Teresa Hedblum, at (360) 407-6959 (e-mail: thed461@ecy.wa.gov).

The approval for oil spill contingency plans expires every five years and the plans must be re-reviewed. The public has 30 days to comment when plans are sub-

mitted to Ecology for review. The majority of the oil spill contingency plans on file with Ecology will expire within the next two years. Ecology has established a telephone number that will indicate which plans are currently under the 30-day public review comment period. If you are interested in reviewing a vessel or facility contingency plan, call (360) 407-6207 and follow the recorded instructions.

### **Spill** SCENE

**Spill Scene** is published by the Washington State Department of Ecology to provide information on oil and hazardous substance spill prevention, preparedness and response. We welcome your comments and questions. Call (360) 407-7211 or write: Editor, **Spill Scene**, Department of Ecology, Spills Program, P.O. Box 47701, Olympia, WA 98504-7701.

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Ecology is an equal opportunity agency. If you have special accommodation needs, please contact the Spills Program at (360) 407-7455 (Voice) or (360) 407-6006 (TDD).



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# Exceptional Compliance Program Awards Will Recognize High Performers

Spills Program Prevention Section staff, headed up by lead tank vessel prevention plan specialist Laura Stratton, launched a new incentives program in April 1999 for superior operators of tankers.

The Exceptional Compliance Program (ECOPRO) recognizes those tank ship owners and operators who demonstrate excellence in tank vessel safety and environmental stewardship by exceeding Washington's Best Achievable Protection (BAP) standards.

The minimum requirement for basic tank vessel prevention plan approval is complying with each of the 31 BAP standards. This is a significant achievement in its own right. The BAP standards are widely recognized as one of the most comprehensive and effective vessel operating and management regimes in the world. ECOPRO, however, is for companies that

want to go even further than basic compliance with Washington marine safety laws. Companies that receive this award will be operating their tank ships at what we believe is one of the highest levels of marine safety in the world today.

The Exceptional Compliance rankings were developed by maritime professionals from six companies that operate tankers in Washington and by maritime professionals in the Spills Program, including Ecology's other vessel prevention plan specialist, Lori Crews, and prevention section manager Stan Norman. The Baltic and International Maritime Council and the American Bureau of Shipping also provided thoughtful guidance and comments.

Tanker owners and operators who achieve the ECOPRO award will receive recognition and publicity for their outstanding efforts.

Companies that achieve exceptional Compliance will receive a certificate and award suitable for display in company offices and on board company owned or operated tank vessels. In addition, companies holding this award will enjoy less frequent Department of Ecology tanker BAP compliance inspections, for example every three years instead of annually. Washington State cannot offer direct monetary incentives to recipients of this award, but we anticipate that it will be regarded favorably by flag states, vetting organizations, marine insurance underwriters, and P & I clubs.

Program staff continue to work on parallel program for tank barge owners and operators. For more information, contact **Laura Stratton** at (360) 407-7485, or fax (360) 407-7288, or e-mail at [lst461@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:lst461@ecy.wa.gov).

## Staff Speak at Oil Spill Conference

The Spills Program was visible at the 1999 International Oil Spill Conference held in Seattle in March. Besides providing a booth for Ecology and the States/BC Oil Spill Task Force, three staff members presented their work. These were:

Dale Davis, Natural Resource Damage Assessment Specialist, *Beyond Natural Resource Damage Assessment – A Navy/State of Washington Oil Spill Restoration Partnership*, poster session.

David Mora, Spill Preparedness and Response Specialist, *Resolving Conflict in Applying the Washington State Natural Resource Damage Assessment Compensation Schedule – Spill*

*Volume Determination in the Absence of Volumetric Methods*, paper presentation.

Joe Subsits, Engineer, *Elements of Sound Facility Prevention Programs*, paper presentation.



Ecology's Spills Program and other members of the States/British Columbia Oil Spill Task Force staffed a booth during the Conference.

# Storms, Grounding End NEW CARISSA's Career

Spills Program staff from the Columbia River Field Office and the Northwest Regional Office provided technical assistance to the U. S. Coast Guard and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality when the bulk freighter NEW CARISSA ran aground just north of the entrance to Coos Bay, Oregon, on February 4. Fierce winter storms, a common occurrence along the Pacific Northwest coast, kept rescue ships at bay and threatened to spill the ship's 359,000 gallons of fuel. Southwest Regional Office staff led the response when tarballs suspected of coming from the ship began washing up on Washington beaches.

To prevent a disastrous oil spill on a significant coastline, the fuel was burned while it was still in the ship. The fire and the heavy



*Photo courtesy of Oregon DEQ*

*The bulk freighter NEW CARISSA ran aground on the Oregon coast in February. The ship was a total loss, a testament to the strength of the coast's storms.*

pounding surf broke the ship in two. A first effort to tow the bow section further to sea for sinking ended when the tow line connection failed and the

ship drifted back to the coast. A second tow succeeded and the bow was sunk far off the coast. The stern is being salvaged in place.

## Are We Pushing Our Luck?

*During the 1998-99 winter there were at least 10 shipping incidents that had the potential to spill significant amounts of oil into Washington's waters. Here are the highlights of some of those incidents.*

- ◆ Nov. 24, tank barge COLUMBIA went adrift when the tow cable parted in heavy seas. With 2.2 million gallons of fuel oil, the barge drifted within nine miles of Cape Shoalwater. The tug was able to re-establish the tow, and proceed to Port Angeles.
- ◆ Nov. 25, cargo ship ARISTOTELIS lost propulsion three miles west of Cape Flattery, and drifted across the entrance to the Strait. Tug assistance was not available. Fortunately, the vessel was able to anchor, preventing a grounding on Vancouver Island.
- ◆ Jan. 18, bulk carrier SABINA (formerly IRENES VISION) lost propulsion off Stuart Island, and drifted for over two hours in the narrow passage of Haro Strait.
- ◆ Feb. 5, container ship APL JAPAN lost propulsion off Port Angeles. It drifted within 400 yards of the beach at Ediz Hook. The crew was finally able to restart the engine as a tug stood by to render assistance.
- ◆ March 28, the manned tank barge BOUCHARD 230 and tug RALPH BOUCHARD ran into heavy seas off Cape Johnson that parted the tow wire. After drifting about 8 miles, the barge was met by a rescue tug, which stood by while the Bouchard tug reconnected to the barge about 11 miles west of Point of Arches. Although the barge was not carrying cargo, it was carrying fuel oil for its generators.

## \$900,000 Shortfall

# Program Meets \$ Challenges

Ecology's Spills Program is fiscally challenged in several areas at the start of this new fiscal year.

On the positive side, the Washington Legislature passed ESHB 2247, which included a \$1,000,000 appropriation to cover a potential revenue shortfall and to provide staffing support and response equipment.

This news, however, was overshadowed by several developments which work against the Program's financial health.

- ◆ The Legislature approved an annual three percent cost-of-living increase for all state

employees for the next two years, and salaries and benefit increases for underfunded job categories. But it did not provide additional revenues to cover the raises and increases.

- ◆ The Program's total overhead costs rose due to the number of positions brought into the Program in the merger with the Office of Marine Safety.
- ◆ The sharp increase in drug labs is increasing hazardous material cleanup costs.
- ◆ Tax refunds from the Program's revenue sources, the Oil Spill Administration Account and the

State Toxics Control Account, continue to reduce revenue available and make effective fund management very difficult.

The net effect is a loss of approximately \$900,000, which represents approximately nine percent of the Program's budget. The Program is meeting this fiscal challenge in several ways, including not filling three vacant positions, and reorganizing to take advantage of the positions authorized by ESHB 2247.

For more information, contact **Joe Stohr**, at (360) 407-7450, or e-mail at [jost461@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:jost461@ecy.wa.gov).

## Year 2000 readiness disclosure

# Are you ready for Y2K? Is Your GPS?

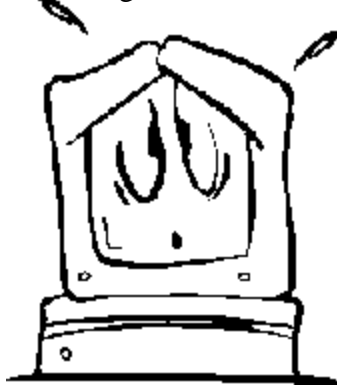
It's almost 2000 – Do you know where your computers are?

The Spills Program reminds vessel and facility owners and operators that they should check any system that uses computer chips to make sure it will continue to operate correctly after January 1, 2000.

Many computer chips store the year field as two digits instead of four, to save storage space, reduce processing time and limit data entry. But those chips, and the software programs and applications using them, may read "00" as "1900" and simply shut down. Even worse, they might continue operating but misinterpret incoming data or produce inaccurate data.

Problems could show up even sooner when the global positioning system (GPS), used worldwide for

navigation, resets its internal week count on August 21-22, 1999. The



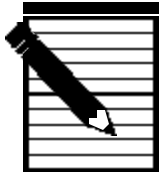
GPS satellites have been checked to make sure they will not be affected, but on-ground receivers and applications may be. Some receivers and applications could incorrectly interpret the date following the reset.

Ecology's Marine Information System, used to track vessels, has already been updated to deal with the Year 2000 problem. It will not be affected by the GPS clock reset.

## First Meeting Planned for Risk Management Panel

The first meeting of the North Puget Sound Long Term Oil Spill Risk Management Panel is planned for September 23 -24. The location and starting time are still to be determined. For more information contact **Jon Neel**, (360) 407-6905, or e-mail at: [jnee461@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:jnee461@ecy.wa.gov).

# Upcoming Events



*Ecology welcomes  
submittals of  
notices of public  
events related to  
oil and hazardous  
substance spill*

*prevention, preparedness and  
response. Ecology reserves the  
right to select events for publica-  
tion. Please contact Mariann  
Cook Andrews at (360) 407-7211  
(e-mail: [maco461@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:maco461@ecy.wa.gov))  
for more information regarding  
submittal deadlines.*

◆ **August 11 – 10 a.m.**

Puget Sound Marine Committee  
Port of Seattle Bldg., Seattle, WA  
Contact: Dave Schneider, (206)  
728-3523

◆ **August 11 – 9 a.m.**

Resource Damage Assessment Comm.  
Ecology Headquarters Building,  
ROA-36, Lacey, WA  
Contact: Dale Davis, (360) 407-6972

◆ **August 12 – 9 a.m.**

Washington Pilotage Commission  
2911 Second Ave., Level B Conf.  
Rm., Seattle, WA  
Contact: Peggy Larson, (206)  
515-3904

◆ **September 8 – 9 a.m.**

Resource Damage Assessment Comm.  
Ecology Headquarters Building,  
ROA-36, Lacey, WA  
Contact: Dale Davis, (360) 407-6972

◆ **September 9 – 9 a.m.**

Washington Pilotage Commission  
2911 Second Ave., Level B Conf.  
Rm., Seattle, WA

Contact: Peggy Larson, (206)  
515-3904

◆ **October 13 – 9 a.m.**

Resource Damage Assessment Comm.  
Ecology Headquarters Building,  
ROA-36, Lacey, WA  
Contact: Dale Davis, (360) 407-6972

◆ **October 13 – 10 a.m.**

Puget Sound Marine Committee  
Port of Seattle Bldg., Seattle, WA  
Contact: Dave Schneider, (206)  
728-3523

◆ **October 14 – 9 a.m.**

Washington Pilotage Commission  
2911 Second Ave., Level B Conf.  
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